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U.S. Ignores '75 Massacre of East Timorese

The civilized world reacted with horror to the slaughter of several hundred Palestinians in Beirut last month, as well it should have.

But butchery of a far greater order of magnitude has been all but forgotten: the genocidal attack on the peaceful people of East Timor by Indonesian troops on Dec. 7, 1975.

The subject of the bloody conquest of East Timor may come up when President Suharto of Indonesia meets with President Reagan in the White House this week, but don't bet on it.

The Reagan administration seems determined to play the same see-no-evil, hear-no-evil, speak-no-evil role that the Ford and Carter administrations saw fit to adopt over the Indonesian campaign that cost the lives of as many as 200,000 East Timorese.

Indonesia's oil and its staunchly anti-communist regime are considered too important to risk by asking picky questions about mass murder and repression.

It's bad enough that President Ford gave his tacit approval to the

Indonesian invasion, and that President Carter declined to apply his loudly proclaimed human-rights standards to Indonesia. But U.S. diplomats ever since have been playing down the Indonesian conquerors' continued brutal treatment of their vanquished neighbors.

"The State Department has engaged in a consistent pattern of discounting reports of Indonesian-inflicted suffering upon the people of East Timor," declared Rep. Tony P. Hall (D-Ohio).

He and Sen. Paul E. Tsongas (D-Mass.) have emphatically challenged the glowing reports submitted by Foreign Service personnel fearful of offending their Indonesian hosts. In addition, 75 members of Congress have signed a letter to President Reagan protesting the Timor tragedy.

Starvation, which played a major role in the mass deaths, is once again a danger, according to the scant firsthand reports issuing from East Timor.

Malaria is a serious problem. And the Indonesians have "relocated" almost 4,000 Timorese to an island called Arturo, which amounts to a detention camp.

Don't expect any outcry over East Timor from the man who is in line to be the new U.S. ambassador to Jakarta, Kent Crane.

A former aide to disgraced Vice President Agnew, Crane reportedly has close ties to the oil and financial

interests that dominate Indonesian politics. He'll be no boat-rocker.

Sources told my associate Jack Mitchell that a formidable coalition of presidential aide Edwin Meese III CIA officials and right-wing advisers are pushing Crane's appointment. Foreign Service officials oppose the nomination because of Crane's reportedly close ties to the intelligence community as well as some alleged business dealings in Indonesia.

Crane's cordial relationship with the spooks is confirmed by a Greek exile leader in a good position to know.

Years ago, when the exile, Elias Demetracopoulos, raised questions about Thomas Pappas, the Greek-American businessman who helped bankroll Nixon, Agnew dispatched Crane to the CIA's "dirty tricks" division to get derogatory information about Demetracopoulos. The CIA obligingly gave Crane a calumnious, one-page memo on Nixon's troublesome tormentor.

So the fix is still in, apparently. Oil and anti-communism will once again keep an American administration from embarrassing Suharto by speaking out in behalf of the oppressed people of East Timor.

Footnote: State Department officials have insisted to Congress that the Agency for International Development is doing all it can to assist the Timorese. Kent Crane had not returned several telephone calls by the time I went to press.